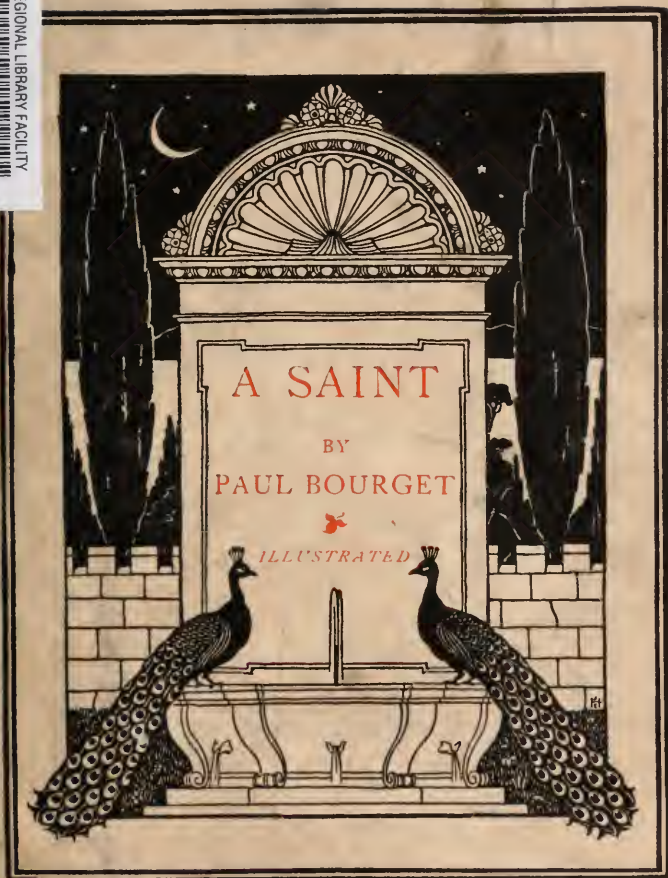


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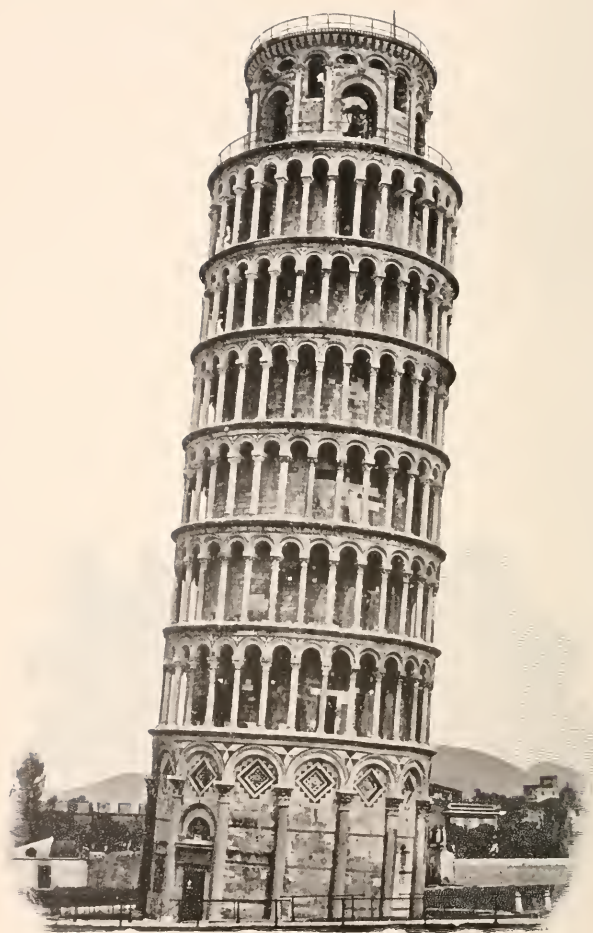
MRS. SARAH R. BARTHOLOMEW



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I.

A SAINT.



PISA.

A S A I N T T

TRANSLATED FROM

Charles G. Loring
PAUL BOURGET'S "PASTELS OF MEN"

BY

KATHARINE PRESCOTT WORMELEY



ILLUSTRATED BY P. CHABAS

BOSTON
ROBERTS BROTHERS
1895

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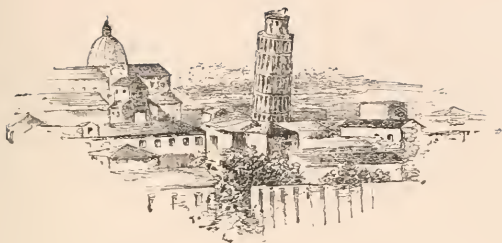
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A SAINT.

TO MADAME GEORGE S. R. T.

I WAS travelling in Italy in the month of October, 188—, with no other object than to get rid of a few weeks in again seeing, this time at my leisure, a number of my favorite masterpieces. The pleasure of a second impression has always been to me more vivid than that of the first; doubtless because I have ever felt the beauty of the arts as a writer,—that is to say, as a man who requires that a picture or a statue should, in the first instance, be a text for thought. Not an æsthetic reason, and one at which all painters who are painters indeed will scoff. And yet this reason alone had brought me, in the month of October of which I speak, to spend a few days at Pisa. I wished to live over again, at my ease, the dream of Benozzo Gozzoli and Orcagna. Here, in a parenthesis, let me say, so as not to seem in the eyes of connoisseurs too ignorant of art, that

I call by the name of Orcagna the painter of the "Triumph of Death" in the Campo Santo of the old town, knowing well that modern criticism questions his paternity of the work. But to me, and to all those whose memory cherishes the admirable lines of Pianto on the tragic fresco, Orcagna is, and ever will be, the sole author of it. At any rate, Benozzo has not lost, through the sceptical and fatal criticism of catalogues, his right and title to the decoration of the west wall of the cemetery.

What intense sensations have I not felt in this little corner of the world, remembering ever that Byron and Shelley lived in the ancient Tuscan town, that my dear master, M. Taine, has described the adjoining spot in the most eloquent of his eloquent pages, that the lyrical poet Pianto came here, and that Benozzo Gozzoli himself, the laborious toiler of painted poesy, lies buried at the foot of the wall on which his frescos are softly fading. In that enclosure of the Pisan Campo Santo, on the sacred earth brought thither in pious ages, I had watched the springtide calling the pale narcissi into bloom at the feet of the black cypresses; I had seen the winters shedding light flakes of snow, melted as soon as fallen; I had felt the torrid sky of an Italian summer weltering above that shadeless spot with crushing heat; and yet I had not exhausted the charm of it, for I now returned there in the



“Vigorously washing-in a water-color presentment of the woman
in the ‘Triumph of Death.’”—PAGE 9.

autumn of which I speak, — little expecting the moral drama in which this visit was to involve me, if not as an actor at least as a deeply interested spectator, though somewhat against my will.

The first episode of this drama was, like that of many others, a rather commonplace incident, which I nevertheless relate with pleasure, though it has but slight connection with my tale. It evokes for me the pleasant recollection of two English old maids. During my visits to the Campo Santo I had noticed this couple, who, by reason of their singular ugliness and the utilitarian oddity of their clothes, seemed a living and caricatural illustration of a certain poet's tender address to the dead : —

“Thou hast no longer sex or age.”

The browner of the two (the other might possibly pass for a ruddy blonde) was vigorously washing-in a water-color presentment of the woman in the “Triumph of Death ;” the one who faces you, in the cavalcade to the left, with her candid eyes and her sensitive mouth, — eyes and mouth which have never lied, and which are never forgotten when once we have loved them. The worthy Englishwoman was totally devoid of talent, but her choice of this subject and the conscientiousness of her work interested me.

Consequently, as these spinsters lived at my hotel, I had somewhat indiscreetly yielded to my curiosity so far as to look for their names on the register. I found that one was named Miss Mary Dobson, the other Miss Clara Roberts. They were about fifty years of age, and were now making that tour "abroad," as they call it, which thousands of their courageous colleagues in celibacy (forced or voluntary) undertake annually from the island shores of Great Britain. The sisterhood start in pairs, in threes, sometimes in fours. Behold them thus alone for fifteen or twenty months; installed in mysterious boarding-houses, the addresses of which are known and transmitted by the whole freemasonry of travelling spinsters; learning new languages in spite of their gray hairs; applying themselves with heroic perseverance to understand the arts; passing through evil places with their purity, which is that of the angels, untainted; ever in quest of an English church, an English cemetery, and an English chemist, — not to speak of the tea which they never fail to prepare after the British fashion in the depths of Calabria or far up the Nile at the precise hour they are in the habit of imbibing it in their drawing-rooms in Kent or Devonshire. I have such an admiration for the moral courage which lurks behind the absurd exteriors of these curious beings that in the course of my too frequent



"A long dinner-table with few places laid because the winter season has not yet begun."—PAGE 11.

vagabondizing I take pains to enter into conversation with them,—all the more, perhaps, because I have discovered that the passion for facts which rules their race makes them not infrequently very useful to consult. They are sure to have verified every statement in the guide-book ; and whoever has wandered, Baedeker in hand, through a remote region of Italy, will readily admit that such verifications are precious. Therefore, on the third evening of my stay at Pisa, the departure of certain guests having brought my place at the table d'hôte next to that of the two old maids, I began a conversation with them, quite sure that they would not reject so good an opportunity to “practise their French.”

You now see the stage-setting, do you not? —a room in an old palace transformed into a hotel dining-room, with more or less modern furniture, the ceiling frescoed in lively colors, a long dinner-table with few places laid because the winter season has not yet begun. On the table, swaying in their brass holders, are the *fiaschi*, those delightful long-necked flasks, with their bellies wrapped in osier and filled with the wine of so-called Chianti. If the little mountain of that name supplies enough to fill all the bottles which are labelled thus it certainly must yield, at the least, a harvest a week. But the false Chianti is a true and good wine, the flavor of which, though rather sharp, tastes of the

grape; and the glow of it colors the cheeks of the seven or eight persons who chance to be stranded for the time being around the table, — a German couple, making the classic wedding journey on this side the Alps; a Milanese merchant, with a face both sly and sensual; two Genoese burghers visiting the neighborhood, and now in Pisa to meet their nephew, a cavalry officer. The latter is dining at the table d'hôte in captain's uniform, dashing, jovial, and speaking in loud tones with the rather guttural accent of the Riviera. His talk, interspersed with laughter, gives me the odyssey of his parents, in which I should be more interested if Miss Mary Dobson had not suddenly broached a subject which roused me, passionate quattrocentist that I am, the lover of frescos and paintings on wood before the sixteenth century.

Miss Mary was the darker of the two spinsters, she whose water-color brushes had so flattened and dulled the rude design of the primitive master; and after a long dissertation on the problem as to whether the famous "Triumph" was to be attributed to Buonamico Buffalmacco or to Nardo Daddi she suddenly addressed me as follows: —

"Have you been to the convent of Monte-Chiaro?"

"Do you mean the one between Pisa and Lucca, on the mountain the other side of Ver-

ruca ?” I replied. “ Well, no ; the guide-book says it takes six hours to drive there, and for two poor Luca della Robbias and a few pictures of the Bologna school which is all they mention — ”

“ What is the date of your guide-book ? ” asked Miss Clara, sharply.

“ I don’t know,” I said, a little embarrassed by the sarcastic manner in which that mouth with its long teeth questioned me. “ The fact is I have a superstition about keeping the same copy that I used when I came to Italy for the first time, — rather long ago, I must admit.”

“ How French that is ! ” returned Miss Clara.

Instantly I understood her pre-Raphaelitism ; it was nothing more than one form of vanity. However, I took no notice of the international sneer, as I might have done by simply repeating the remark and emphasizing the Britannic benevolence of it. In dealing with English folk of the aggressive species silence is the true weapon, for it wounds them to the quick of their defect. They hunger and thirst for contradiction, from the combative instinct which inheres in their blood and impels the race to every form of conquest and proselytism. I therefore bore with the magnanimity of a sage the sharp glance of Miss Clara’s blue eyes, which challenged to mortal combat the whole Gallic nation, the more easily perhaps, because Miss Mary interposed, remarking : —

“The truth is they discovered at Monte-Chiaro about two years ago some very beautiful frescos of your beloved Benozzo, as fresh and brilliant in color as those in the Capello Riccardi at Florence. He was known to have worked in the convent, and he was also known to have painted, among other things, the legend of Saint Thomas. That calumniator Vasari says so. But no trace of this work, which the master must have executed about the time of his Pisan frescos, remained. Now see how things happen. Dom Griffi, the old Benedictine abbé who has had charge of the convent ever since it was ‘nationalized,’ ordered a servant to sweep down a spider’s web in a corner of one of the cells now used as lodging-rooms for travellers. A bit of plaster was knocked off by the broom. The abbé sent for a ladder and clambered up, in spite of his three-score years and ten. I ought to tell you that the convent is his idol, his passion. He has seen it peopled by two hundred of his brethren, and he accepted the post of warden after the decree in the full belief that he will one day see it restored to what it has been. His sole thought is of the time when the monks will return and find the ancient structure preserved from degradation. That is why he consented to the trying service of giving board and lodging to tourists. He was afraid of an inn at his gates, like that at Monte-Cassin;

he could n't endure the idea of such an inn close beside the convent, with American girls dancing every evening to a piano — ”

“ But he mounted the ladder, and what then ? ” I said, to cut short the panegyric on Dom Griffi. I was fearful of a reactionary end in some bigoted Protestant attack ; and in fact, Miss Clara did not lose the opportunity.

“ I must say,” she remarked, profiting by the interruption. “ I should never have believed, unless I had known Dom Griffi, that a man could possibly be so intelligent or so useful in a priest's garb.”

“ When he mounted the ladder,” said Miss Mary, “ he scratched off more of the plaster very carefully. First he found a forehead and eyes, then a mouth, then the whole face of a Christ. All these Italians are born artists ; it runs in their veins. The abbé saw at once that he had a fresco of great value under a layer of plaster.”

“ Those monks,” interrupted Miss Clara, “ found nothing better to do than to whitewash the masterpieces of the 15th century and hide the decorations of the old masters behind their stucco ornamentations and their frescos of a depraved style.”

“ Nevertheless, it was the monks who ordered those very decorations,” I said ; “ which goes to prove that good or bad taste has nothing to do with religious convictions.”

"Well, naturally," replied the terrible Englishwoman, "being a Parisian you are sceptical."

"Let me finish my story," cried Miss Mary, by which I perceived that she was something more than pre-Raphaelite, she was kind ; which in these days of vagrant æstheticism is rare. She was visibly distressed by the militant inclinations of her travelling companion as directed towards me. "Dear Miss Roberts, you shall discuss that subject later," she said. "The good abbé pondered how he could clear the wall of the whitewash without endangering the fresco, and this is how he managed it. He glued a cloth to the plaster and let it dry till it held firmly ; then he wrenched cloth and plaster away and scratched off what remained inch by inch. It took him months, poor old man, to uncover, first, one panel on which Saint Thomas is represented laying his finger on the Saviour's wounds, and then another, where the apostle is seen at an audience granted to him by the King of the Indies, Gondoforus —"

"But you, of course, don't know that legend," said Miss Clara, brusquely addressing me. This time I would not give her satisfaction by again exhibiting French superficialty. I had read the legend — by chance, be it said — in *Voragine* when I was hunting, I must admit, for the subject of a tale wanted by a boulevard newspaper. I recollected it on account of the

noble symbolism it contains, and also for its exotic character which gives it all the charm of the picturesque. Saint Thomas being at Cesarea, our Lord appeared to him and ordered him to go to Gondoforus, because that king was seeking for an architect to build him a nobler dwelling than the palace of the Roman emperor. Thomas obeyed. Gondoforus, then on the point of starting for a distant seat of war, gave him enormous quantities of gold and silver intended for the construction of the palace. On his return he ordered the Saint to show him the work. Thomas had distributed the treasure entrusted to him to the poor, even to the last penny, and not one stone of the promised palace had been laid. The king, furiously angry, imprisoned his strange architect and proceeded to meditate as to what were the most refined tortures with which he could punish the traitor. But that very night, behold, the spectre of his brother, who had been dead four days, stood at the foot of his bed and said to him: "The man thou desirest to torture is the servant of God. The angels have shown me a wondrous dwelling of gold and silver and precious stones which he has built for thee in Paradise." Overcome by the apparition and by the words which he heard, Gondoforus hastened to fling himself at the prisoner's feet. Thomas raised him and said: "Dost thou not know, O King, that the

only mansions which endure are those which our faith and our charity build for us in heaven."

"It is quite certain," I said, after referring (not without a certain malicious complacency) to the foregoing legend, "that it must have been a very interesting subject to a painter passionately devoted, like Benozzo, to sumptuous robes, complicated architecture, landscapes with illimitable flora and chimerical beasts —"

"Ah!" cried Miss Dobson, pushing aside in her enthusiasm the dish of purple and green figs which the waiter was offering to her, — a waiter, by the bye, with cheeks that were stiff with a six days' growth of beard, and a threadbare black coat opening to view amazing pink coral buttons stuck into a ragged shirt-front, — "you can't imagine the magnificence of the Gondoforus in the fresco at Monte-Chiaro, — a sort of Moor, with a green silk robe embroidered in relief with gold, yellow boots with spurs, also gold — such liquid coloring! so perfectly preserved, so fresh! Just think! these layers of whitewash must have been put on the wall about the end of the 16th century; consequently, there's not a blemish in the painting, no retouching; there it still is in the cell where it was painted; which used to be, I am told, the oratory of the bishops who visited the convent. It covers the whole of one large wall and the space above a window."



"The door opened to admit a couple." — PAGE 19.

The conversation had reached this point and I was just asking Miss Mary for a few points as to the ways of communication between Pisa and the convent (for I was drawn there past all power of resistance by this revelation of an unknown work by my favorite master) when the door opened to admit a couple, already known, no doubt, to the English spinsters, for Miss Mary cast down her eyes with a blush, while Miss Clara remarked to her in English :—

“Why, it is that Frenchman and the woman we met in Florence at the *trattoria*. How extraordinary that a respectable hotel like this should receive such persons.”

I looked myself, and saw a couple taking their seats at one of the small tables which surrounded the large one, whose questionable character was too evident to allow me to accuse my formidable neighbor of slandering them. It was equally impossible to deny the nationality of the young man. He might have been twenty-five years of age, but his drawn features and pallid skin, his shrunken shoulders and the nervous condition visible in his whole being gave him a look of premature age, counteracted however by a pair of black eyes which were very keen and extremely handsome. He was dressed with a semi-elegance which had a flavor of pretension on the one hand, and a touch of bohemianism on the other. You ask me how ?

I can no more put these shades into words than I can fully explain the general characteristics which made this stranger the type, exclusively and incontestably, the type of a Frenchman. It is a cut of the coat, it is a gesture, it is a way of sitting down to table and taking up the card to order dinner, which tells us instantly that we have a compatriot within two feet of us. I shall have the courage to admit, although I may wound what a humorist sarcastically calls ante-chamber patriotism, that such a meeting is more alarming than agreeable. Travelling Frenchmen certainly bring their worst qualities to the front,—like travelling English and travelling Germans for that matter, with this difference, that while I am indifferent to those of the English, and those of the Germans simply entertain me, I suffer from the vulgar qualities of Frenchmen because I know how they slander our dear, good land. I have never, in an Italian café, heard a Frenchman on his travels talking loudly and flouting the town where he chanced to be and the one from which he came in maliciously depreciating speeches, without reflecting that there were twenty ears about him to absorb his jests, or rather the mere wording of them. For though five foreigners out of ten may understand our language, how many know its spirit—I mean the harmless spirit of its wit? One in a hundred possibly. What absurd national

misunderstandings are begun and envenomed by these thoughtless remarks made in public with as little evil intention as that with which some of us scribble articles in a newspaper office merely to eke out "copy."

The present stranger belonged, fortunately for my nerves, to the species which, thanks be to God! does exist, of silent Frenchmen. Moreover, his companion of the evening absorbed his attention in a manner which certainly seemed to justify Miss Roberts' attack. This mysterious friend was about thirty-five years of age, and if he, under every aspect, was a Frenchman of the bourgeois class, she was as unmistakably an Italian, from her little head to her little feet, from her rather too marked features to the flouncings of her gown, from the end of her arm laden with bracelets to the tip of her shoe with its exaggerated heel. Her black eyes betrayed when they rested on the young man a passion which was certainly not feigned. Neither of them appeared to be aware that they were under observation, and in spite of a vague expression of slyness and distrust which something, I hardly know what, gave to the man, this air of mutual sentiment and absorption made me suddenly sympathetic with them, — so much so that I undertook their defence against Miss Roberts when she continued: —

"Besides, she is twenty years older than he!"

“Say ten,” I interrupted, laughing; “and she is very pretty.”

“With us, a gentleman never parades himself in that way with a creature who is not a lady.”

I was thankful that she made this speech in English, which my compatriot was not likely to understand, all the more because she uttered it in a high, clear voice. I could not help replying in the same language, partly, I acknowledge, from the vanity of proving to her that I could speak it.

“But how do you know she is not a lady?”

“How do I know?” Ah! my poor little vanity. I was punished for it on the spot, for she corrected my pronunciation sarcastically by repeating my own words. “Why, look at the way she eats.”

I must confess that these two specimens of the Latin race presented at that moment a spectacle which did not conform to any of the precepts taught by governesses on the farther shores of the British Channel. While waiting for the soup, the gentleman had begun upon the flask of Chianti and the bread beside his plate; he was dipping his bread in wine; while she, on her part, was nibbling a bit of citron, taken from the dishes of the dessert. The contrast between the daughters of Albion (as they were called in the novels of 1830) and these children of nature was a little overpowering. I was

afraid I should laugh, and so, as dinner was now over, I left the table at the same time as the Germans, the Milanese, the relatives of the officer, and the officer himself. I thought my neighbors would soon follow us, as in fact they did, leaving the two lovers to their tête-à-tête, under the indulgent protection of the coral-buttoned waiter. Perhaps there was some virtue in my rather precipitate retreat, for I surmised a slight romance in the rather unintelligible conjunction of the young Frenchman and the beautiful Italian. But I would die sooner than remorselessly play the part of spy which modern writers are pleased to call documentary research, and of which they boast as a professional merit.

The following morning I had almost forgotten this more or less morganatic pair, and was thinking only of the frescos discovered by Dom Griffi, and of the best means of transporting myself to the convent of Monte-Chiaro. I went to the office of the hotel to discuss the little journey with the clerk, an ex-Garibaldian who was so proud of having worn the red blouse of the *Mille* that he still lived in a fog of ultra-revolutionary fancies, — all the while busy, with commendable activity, in providing that hot-water was duly sent to No. 6 and that No. 10 obtained the tea it ordered.

“The government is too indulgent to these

conspirators," he said to me, referring to the poor monks, instead of replying to my questions about the road to take, the vehicle to choose, and the price to pay. My friends the Englishwomen had gone by the diligence as far as it went, and had done the rest of the way on foot. I succeeded, however, in extracting from the Cavaliere Dante Annibale Cornacchini (such was the name of the former companion of the Hero) a promise that a coachman selected by him should await me with a light carriage at the *tocco*. What a charming expression! and how characteristic of the Italian people; there's a whole sensation in it. It means one blow of a hammer, and also one hour after midday, the hour when the clock-hammer sounds one blow. What was my surprise when on leaving the office of the hotel (where a bronze statuette of the General in his blouse and another of Mazzini in an overcoat surmounted the hostelry placards) I found myself face to face with the young Parisian of the previous evening, who was evidently waiting for me; for he approached at once with a certain grace of manner, or so it seemed to me, — for what author would not have looked with favorable eyes upon the bearing of a stranger who met him with words like these:—

“Monsieur, I have seen your name upon the register, and as I have read all your works I venture” — etc.



"I found myself ten minutes later walking along the quay with this stranger." — PAGE 25.

It is enough to have been before the public in any capacity whatever to know how little such compliments are worth. But the childish vanity of the literary man is such that he is always taken in by them and does as I then did ; for (having vowed to myself that I would not spoil my sensation of that dear and mournful Pisa with frivolous talk and new acquaintances) I found myself ten minutes later walking along the quay with this stranger ; in less than half an hour I was wandering, still in his company, beneath the vaults of the Campo Santo ; and at the end of another hour I had induced him to accompany me to the convent, and we were both getting into the *carrozzola* with one horse which was to take us to Monte-Chiaro. This sudden travelling intimacy sprang up without the motive on my part of a nearer view of the pretty and natural Italian who had dined with him on the preceding evening. He had taken care, be it understood, to speak of her at once. I thus learned that the possessor of those expressive features, that emotional pallor, and the gestures which were almost vulgar was an actress in a travelling troop then at Florence, and that she had left Pisa that morning to play at night, and that he had been unable to accompany her. He did not tell me why. But I guessed the reason from the rest of his history, which he related in the first half-hour we were together. Even without the

rather romantic attraction of this little incident he would have taken my attention as a sharply defined type of a class of young men whom I already knew, as I thought, sufficiently well. Still one can never see too much of the representatives of a coming generation. How can we help them (for that is the duty of those of us who wield the pen) if we do not talk with them, and talk a good deal, too? But, alas, it was not impressions of this kind that I was seeking along the shores of the sad and glaucous Arno. Was I fated to meet, everywhere and at all times, that which I like least in Paris without being able to check my interest in it, as though I really liked it? Would my insatiable curiosity about the human soul never cease to be stronger than my lofty projects of an ideal existence among the master-pieces of art?

The young man was known by the unaristocratic name of Philippe Dubois. He was the fourth son of a university professor of some standing but little means. After a brilliant course of study at his provincial lyceum he had come to Paris, first with a scholarship as licentiate, next on a fellowship. He passed his two examinations, and the influence of a friend of his father obtained for him a mission to Italy in quest of archæological remains. This employment had come to an end during the present month, and he was now on his way back

to France. I had lived too keenly during my own youth among surroundings analogous to his, not to understand at once the pinched condition to which the family resources had reduced him. Probably he had barely enough money to get home. That was, no doubt, the real reason why the actress had left him without his being able to follow her. In recalling at this moment the various confidences he made to me I once more recognize the truth that external facts are of little account; the true motor is in the soul which receives their impression.

This sudden attraction between a young student in love with the world of antiquity, where all is beauty, and an ardent and disinterested young actress is already assuming the charm of a sentimental idyl, is it not? Remark the elements, — a forced parting, the shedding of many tears, the acceptance of a path to which destiny has called us, — truly a romance of capricious fate, and all its poesy!

I had no difficulty in assuring myself that Philippe Dubois felt none of the sad and touching emotions which belonged to his romance. There was not the slightest shade of tenderness in the words with which he unfolded to me his facile intrigue. They betrayed nothing but the vanity of being loved by a woman who, as I afterwards ascertained, was a good deal before the public. But then, if he had been the ingen-

uous lover that he ought to have been would he have captured my attention as he did when I discovered that his past existence of studious youth was but a phase, an aspect, just as this love affair was, to his mind, a mere accident? That which constituted the actual being of this young fellow was one of the most excessive literary ambitions which I have met during my intercourse with such aspirants, — an ambition that was all the more keen because his pride, joined to a certain sullen timidity, had hitherto prevented him from entering the career. During the four or five years of arid study which followed his college life he had nourished the *literary incubus* on his breast with all the cruel candor that malady compels. There were in him, and very distinctly, two persons: one submissive and duty-bound, the son of a professor sent on a mission; the other poetic, with the soul of a romance-maker without a career, with all the acrimony of that precocious bitterness which accompanies a repressed vocation. Such duality is a proof of strong will or, better still, of a nature superior through adaptiveness and the power of self-control. But the harshness and acrimony revealed at the same time a loveless soul, whose chief aspirations in a literary career were for the coarser satisfactions of fame and money.

“You can understand,” he said to me, after relating several scenes in his intercourse with

the poor actress in which he played a sufficiently Juanesque part to take pleasure in recalling them, "you can understand that I have not lost the advantage of such emotions. I have nearly finished a little volume of verses which I will show you later — Ah! I've had enough of Etruscan tombs and Greek inscriptions and all that pedantic drudgery which I only agreed to do for pay. As soon as I take my last degree I shall resign and launch out into a literary career. I have a series of articles in my head. Some I've already sent to various journals signed with a pen-name. They have not appeared — envy, I know, in the men who read them."

"You should make allowance for the unhappy editors, who have not time to read everything themselves," I said. "They are pledged to take certain things; and besides, they must admit achieved positions and well-known talent."

"Well-known talent! let's talk of that," he exclaimed with a bitter laugh, which increased my perception of the smothered rage of the unpublished writer, embittered by envy before he had even measured himself with his rivals; and he proceeded to take up one by one all the best-known authors of the present day. This one was a mere relater of anecdotes without thought; that one a hawker of images for workmen; that other a Paul de Kock modernized, the fourth was a social manœuvrer, clever at sugaring

Stendhal and Balzac for the cloyed stomachs of fashionable women. To all of them he fastened the low tales tattled throughout Paris by the score in the childishly cruel little world of literary aspirants. I let him talk with a profound sense of sadness; not that I attach extreme importance to the strictures of the newcomers upon their elders — among whom I now rank. Such attacks have been made from all time, and they have their uses; it was the sarcasm of Mephistopheles which compelled Faust to work. But I perceived beneath these harsh criticisms (with which perhaps he fancied he pleased me by condemning my literary fellows, foolish lad!) a real anguish. Above all, I noticed in him the excessive and preternatural pride which belongs to our period — I mean in the world of thinkers. Formerly all ambitions were alike selfish, though that among literary men was the least perceptibly so. Nowadays when universal levelling has brought the recognized brain-worker into a more brilliant position (at least apparently) literature appears to many as a fair means of rapid fortune. They enter it therefore as others enter commerce — for precisely the same reasons. There is, however, this difference. The ardent toiler in the Bourse and its by-ways knows that he has money behind him; the ardent toiler in literature mistakes his eagerness after success for the afflatus of apostleship; and this produces, if suc-

cess does not come to him by the time he is forty, a condition of soul that is truly terrible, for the most painful passions and the vilest combine to rend him. This was seen only too plainly among certain writers of the Commune. As I listened to the young man's talk I knew him for the goaded rebel of his circumstances. But, even so, the rebel of the period. He held himself in hand, partly from an instinct of bourgeois prudence, and also from a natural taste for the higher culture which ought to have saved him, and might still do so. Had he not had the intelligence and the patience to acquire, in spite of his envious literary fever, a science, the knowledge of a craft? and this thought gave me the idea of a struggle which might have taken place or was now taking place within him.

"You are very severe on your elders," I said, to stop his string of Parisian calumnies. "I know all those tales; they are monotonously abject and false!"

"You'll see what I shall say when I begin to write!" he cried, with a fatuous self-conceit that was naïve and yet villanous. "Ha! ha! one must treat one's predecessors as the Polynesians do old men. They put them up a tree and shake it. As long as the old fellows have strength to hold on it's all right. When they fall they are knocked on the head and eaten."

I did not reply to the youthful blood-thirsti-

ness of this paradox. Philippe Dubois was merely "getting a rise" out of me, to use an expressive slang term now a little out of date. I continued the conversation by inquiring as to his researches in archæology; which put him into visible ill-humor. Then I gave him, point-blank, the advice not to enter journalism when he returned to France, but to find a situation in the provinces, where he could live a useful life and eventually come before the public as the writer of some valuable work. That, alas! was the advice which was given to me at his age, but I had not followed it; which goes to prove that this lottery of misery and fame called the profession of men of letters will always tempt a certain class of souls among young men. Must I own it? I felt a sort of irony, almost an hypocrisy in the rôle of moralist which I was playing. It gave me a slight sense of remorse, and then, as I really pitied the groundwork of inward dissatisfaction on which he appeared to me to be living, I ended by proposing that he should go with me to the convent. This excursion led to the brief and rapid drama to which I have alluded, — to explain which these over-long preliminaries were really necessary. Philippe's return would be delayed only two days; he accepted the proposal and we started as the hour "struck" according to the promise of the *ex-Mille*, another of whose delightful say-

ings I cannot refrain from here quoting. He seized the opportunity, while we were waiting for the coachman, to communicate his ideas on the existing French parliament. "They have lost the revolutionary traditions," he said to me; and then, after a terrorist declamation which I will not transcribe, he added, with comical melancholy, "I even think they are capitalists!"

Thanks to this speech, which Philippe enjoyed as much as I did, we started in "high spirits" as Miss Mary Dobson would have said, I much disposed, as indeed he was, to enjoy the trip. The road which leads from Pisa to Monte-Chiaro runs at first through a charming landscape of vineyards interspersed with mulberry trees. Gigantic reeds quiver to the breeze, villas surrounded by cedars bear marble lions on their entrance gates, and always, for a background, lie the gorges of that mountain which, as Dante says, prevents the Pisans from seeing Lucca: —

"Cacciando 'l lupo e i lupicini al monte,
Per che i Pisani veder Lucca non ponno."

"That is what is lacking to us in France," I remarked to my companion after quoting the lines. "We have no poet who has given a legendary fame to the remotest corners of his native land."

"Do you care for that?" he answered. "Now, for my part, Joanne's guide-book for this region

puts me quite out of conceit of the Divine Comedy."

Receiving this reply and noticing that his late gayety was already over, I regretted having brought him. I foresaw that if he began by fencing with paradox he would keep to the foils; and a young man of his type once thrown into an attitude of self-conceit, stiffens himself in it more and more, though it be to his own injury. I dropped into silence therefore, and tried to lose myself in the contemplation of nature, which was now growing wilder. Our carriage, though light, was moving slowly. We were entering a region which was almost without vegetation. Bare foot-hills rose on all sides; huge swellings, as it were, of grayish clay fissured by rain. No more brooks, no more vineyards, no olive-trees, no villas, but a positive resemblance to a desert. The coachman was off his box. He was a little man, with a square and delicately cut face, who called his gray mare Zara and softened, like other Tuscans, the hard *c* at the beginning of words into the aspirated *h*. "Huesta havalla," he said, speaking of his beast, instead of "questa cavalla," — this mare.

"I bought her at Livorno, monsieur," he said to me. "I paid only two hundred francs for her because they thought she was lame. Look and see if she is! — Hey! Zara, courage! She follows me about, monsieur, just like a dog, and

I love her, ah, yes, I love her! My wife is jealous, but I tell her, 'Zara earns my bread, and you — you eat it.' There, monsieur, look at those rocks; that's where Lorenzo di Medici came near being murdered after the massacre of the Pazzi."

"Is n't it a curious thing," I remarked to my companion, "that this man, who is only cab-driver, should talk to us in the same breath of his mare Zara and Lorenzo di Medici? Ah, these Italians! How they know the history of their beloved land, and how proud they are of it!"

"Oh, as for that," said Philippe, shrugging his shoulders, "Alfieri has a line which suits them 'The human plant is born maturer here than elsewhere.' The fact is that they are taught from their earliest years to speculate on foreigners; they are trained to the quest of fees. They are scarcely weaned before they turn into guides. Ha! I'll write a novel on modern Italy and its colossal humbugs! I've collected notes. I'll show up this nation —"

Whereupon he launched forth into a violent diatribe against that sweet country where the *si* resounds, while I continued, for my part, to see her as she first appeared to me in 1874, the home, the sole home of Beauty. Philippe's outburst reminded me of talks I had heard in my early years, when I frequented the symposia

of future poets and romance-writers. Nearly all these embryo writers were employed in the public offices. Bitterly hating that abject life, they spent hours in filling their souls with gall, pouring out their contempt for men and things with a species of acrid eloquence which often made me, in those days, doubt everything and myself as well. I was ignorant then of what I have since had too good reason to know by experience, that such eloquence is merely a form of impotent envy which knows itself for what it is. All great talent begins and ends in love and in enthusiasm. The precocious cynics are the unfortunates who foresee their future sterility and are taking a premature revenge. Heavens ! how I wished the fellow would talk to me (with exaggerated, even ridiculous ardor if he chose) about Florence where he had worked, where he had been loved, — yes, above all, about his love. But he really seemed to have forgotten it as he plunged, apropos of the book he intended to write on Italy, into inquiries as to the salaries or the profits of our principal authors.”

“Is it true that Jacques Molan gets a franc and a half a volume ? They tell me Vincy is paid two francs a line — ah, the wretch !”

I now discerned behind all this bitter criticism and the hardening effect of disillusion an almost frantic desire for money, and by an inconsistency which was really explainable, I for-

gave him for that sentiment far more than for his irony. The iron hand of necessity presses so cruelly upon a brain in which all youthful energies are seething, and which sees in a trifle of gold the emancipation of its inner self.

"And to think," he concluded with infinite bitterness, "that my father will not give me even the first three thousand francs that I must have to live in Paris before I make my first appearance as an author! Yes, that sum would be enough to keep me while I learned my ground and waged my first battle. Three thousand francs! just what a commonplace fellow like [here the name of a writer much in vogue] gets for fifty pages of copy!"

I have omitted to say that in the meantime he had sketched his father and mother for my benefit in rather flattering likenesses. How can I explain that in spite of all this he still continued to interest me? He was giving vent to the ideas I most dislike; he divulged sentiments which seemed to me radically opposed to those a young writer ought to feel. But with it all I felt that he suffered; and I waited for the reaction, when, having produced his first effect, he might listen to my sage counsels and possibly let me rectify two or three of his absurd points of view. On this I counted all the more because his manner of expressing himself, and his references, revealed a genuine culture and a mind that

was more than keen — that was strong and original.

The scenery grew more and more savage. We had left behind us, in the far distance, the great plain on which Pisa lies. The dome and the leaning tower reappeared every now and then between two peaks, as if raised in relief upon a map. Livorno was outlined far below, with the sea in all its blueness; while about us yawned those great holes hollowed in the friable earth which they call in those parts *balze*. Summits and peaks bare and menacing overhung us. The cattle, now few in number, were no longer the beautiful white beasts of the Maremma, with their long, straight horns. The horns of these were short and curved upwards, their hides were as gray as the soil. For the first time since we started Philippe Dubois said a few words which betrayed a consciousness of present sensation.

“Is n’t the whole landscape like a series of pit-holes? — just the place for a convent.”

At that instant the coachman, now on his box, turned to me and called out:—

“Monsieur, there ’s Monte-Chiaro.”

With the end of his whip he pointed to a valley on a slope of the mountain more gullied than the rest, in the centre of which, on a little hill planted with cypress-trees, stood a long structure built of red brick. On that cloudless blue day the color of the walls contrasted so



MONTE-CHIARO.

vividly with the blackness of the surrounding foliage that the reason for the name, Monte-Chiaro, was obvious. Except on the Monte-Oliveto, near Sienna, I have never seen a sanctuary for retreat so relentlessly far removed from all approach of human life. I knew, from information obtained of the Garibaldian at Pisa, which eked out that of the Englishwomen, that the abbé had consented to the humble task of housing and feeding the visitors who came to see the convent, which was secularized in 1867.

"What sort of cooking do you think we shall find in this Thebaïd?" I said to my companion, to whom I had previously explained the manner in which we were to pass the night and the following day.

"As there's a tariff charge of five francs a day," he replied, "the priest would n't belong to this country if he did n't put three in his own pocket."

"Well, at any rate, a fine Benozzo Gozzoli is well worth a bad dinner," I replied, laughing.

Half an hour after we had thus come in sight, from a rise in the road, of the time-worn refuge of the Benedictines, once so celebrated throughout Tuscany, now so sadly solitary, the white mare Zara was beginning to climb the hilly approach, which was planted with cypress-trees. My companion and I left the carriage and walked

up for a better view of the little shrines raised along the side of the road at a distance of some fifty feet apart, and were under the spell, he as well as I, of the melancholy majesty of this approach to the cloister. I beheld in thought the innumerable white cowls which had filed through these sombre avenues, the Benedictines of Monte-Chiaro having been, like those of Oliveto, dedicated to the Virgin. My English friend had initiated me into this little matter of costume. I thought of the simple souls to whom this barren horizon had marked the end of the world, of the weary souls who had found rest in this lonely spot, of the violent souls gnawed here as elsewhere by envy, by ambition, by all those cravings of pride which the apostle justly classes among the lusts of the flesh. My absorption in this vision was so complete that I woke with a start when the coachman, who was walking up this last ascent, leading Zara by the bridle and talking to her to encourage her, suddenly turned and called back to me :—

“Monsieur, here’s the Father abbé coming to meet us. He must have heard the wheels.”

“Why, that’s the late Hyacinth, of the Palais Royal!” cried Philippe. It is true that, seen as he was on the threshold of the convent, at the farther end of the sombre path, the poor monk did present a beggarly appearance. He wore a ragged cassock, the color of which, originally

black, was now greenish. He told me later that the government had placed him in charge of the confiscated convent on condition that he renounced the beautiful white robe of his order. His tall, thin body, slightly bowed by age, rested on a stick. The brim of his hat was thread-worn. His face, turned towards the new-comers, and perfectly smooth, did vaguely resemble that of a comic actor, while an endless nose developed therefrom, — the nose of a snuff-taker, — seeming longer still from the leanness of the cheeks and the sunken mouth, which had lost its front teeth. But the old man's glance soon corrected this first impression. Though his eyes were not large, and their color, of a muddy green, was indistinct, a flame burned within them which would soon have quenched the jesting spirit of my young companion if he had had the slightest experience in judging of the human countenance. His impertinent remark shocked me all the more because he made it in a high tone of voice, which sounded through the deep silence of the autumn afternoon. But did Dom Gabriele Griffi understand French? and if he did, would the name of the poor comedian who played the part of Marasquin so comically in the *Mari de la débutante*, mean anything to his mind? The foolish jest served to flash the scenes of that amusing play before my mind. What a contrast! The four little girls who cry so gayly under the de-

spairing nose of the said Hyacinth, all four pointing their pretty toes in the air at the same moment, "*Sa femme l'a quitté — pour aller faire la noce — et allez donc,*" were pirouetting before me when the hermit, whose guests we were now to be, said to us in the purest and most elegant Italian, —

"You have come, gentlemen, to visit the convent? Why did you not send me word? Pasquale," he added, addressing the coachman, "you should have told these gentlemen to send me a written notice."

"I thought, of course, the gentlemen had done so, Father abbé, when the clerk at their hotel confided them to my care."

"Well, they must eat what there is," said the abbé; then turning to us with a kindly smile, and a gesture towards heaven, he added, "When things go wrong we must shut our eyes and commend ourselves *up there*."

I stammered, in moderately correct Italian, an excuse, which the father cut short with a wave of his hand.

"Come and look at your rooms in the first place. To console you for the food you will be obliged to eat I will make you priors of the order."

He laughed at his little joke, the meaning of which I did not at the moment seize. I was completely absorbed in the strange sight of the vast red edifice in the glow of the setting sun;

measuring its great size and comprehending its solitude in the same glance. Monte-Chiaro was built at various periods, from the day in 1259 when the head of the family of the Gherardesca, uncle of Ugolino the tragic, retired to this remote valley with nine companions, seeking to do penance. In the last century over three hundred monks lived here at their ease; and the abbey and its belongings, its bakery, fish-pond, wine-press, and cow-sheds, sufficed for their maintenance. But the innumerable windows of this great farmhouse were now closed, the faded color of the shutters, once green, told of its abandonment, as did the grass on the terrace before the church and the veil of dusty cobwebs on the walls of the corridors through which we passed as we followed Dom Griffi.

Even the minor details of the ornamentation showed the former prosperity of the abbey, from the vast lavabo of marble, with lion's heads, placed at the entrance of the refectory, to the architecture of the three cloisters, one succeeding another, and all three decorated with frescos. A mere glance showed me that these paintings were in the pedantic Italian taste of the seventeenth century; possibly, therefore, their academic coloring concealed some spontaneous masterpiece of a Gozzoli or an Orcagna. We mounted the steps of a staircase hung with pictures blackened by time, among them a charming

cavalier of Timoteo della Vite, the real master of Raffaele, stranded here by chance. Then we entered another corridor on the next floor, with numerous cell doors marked *Visitator primus*, *Visitator secundus*, and so on, until we stopped before the last, which was surmounted by a mitre and crozier. The abbé, who had not said a word since we left the entrance, except to point out the Timoteo, now spoke in French, with a slightly Italian turn of phrase, but very little accent, —

“These are the quarters which I give to guests;” then making way for us to enter, he added: “The superiors of the convent occupied these rooms for five hundred years.”

I glanced at Master Philippe from the corner of my eye, and perceived that he was somewhat shamefaced at the discovery that our guide was thoroughly conversant with the French language. He had chosen as we came along the corridors to make other remarks and jokes in very doubtful taste. Had the abbé noticed them, and did he mean to give us warning that he understood what we said? or was he merely seeking in his simple hospitality to relieve us of the effort of speaking in a foreign language? I could not guess his meaning from the immovable features of his large face. He seemed wholly absorbed in the numerous memories which the vast room where we now stood evoked for him. It was



“These are the quarters which I give to guests.” — PAGE 44.

poorly furnished with a few wooden chairs, a square table, and a sofa. In one corner a half-open door gave to view an altar covered with a smoke-stained cloth ; it was there, no doubt, that the priors said their prayers. Another door, opposite and wide open, showed two more connecting rooms, each with an iron bed, wooden chairs, and wash-basins standing on rickety bureaus. The red-tiled floors were not even polished ; the woodwork of the doors and the window frames was cracked and defaced, but the landscape seen from the latter was really glorious. On a height directly opposite was a village with houses close together, and from this village to the monastery a marvellous vegetation clothed the slope,—no longer the gloomy cypresses of the other side, but oaks, whose green foliage was turning crimson ; while farther down, in the valley which lay to the southward, were other signs of cultivation, and olive-trees interspersed among the oaks. Evidently the monks stranded in this Thebaïd had toiled there. Beyond this oasis solitude and desolation reappeared, sterner than before, darkly frowned upon by the highest peak of the Pisan mountains, that of Verruca, where a ruined castle is still crumbling, once the stronghold of some lord of the soil, against whose attacks the square bastion which defends the convent on this side was doubtless built. This little square redoubt

was outlined, with its crenelated bastion in red stone, before the window at which we stood, and against the blue of a sky now flecked with rosy vapor. My companion was no longer disposed to jest, being struck, as I was, to the depths of his artistic nature, by the graceful severity of that horizon on which had rested the eyes, long closed, of many monks, some thinking only of another world, others beholding in the rosy sky so softly roseate the mirage of an earthly paradise, others again, ambitious and lordly, dreaming amid this silence of a cardinal's hat, or it may be, of the tiara, and then — "the silence vast and fathomless of death."

That line in the "Contemplations" came to my memory, as it ever does in all encounters with the past, when I feel the shock of a sensation, which is almost agony, produced by too close a contact with that which once was but never shall be again. It lasted barely a minute, but during that minute the ancient life of the old monastery lay spread before my eyes, incarnate in the humble or the ambitious dreams of those who had stood where I was standing, the princes of that cloister, whose sole representative was an old abbé with ragged cassock and rusty shoes, who, breaking the silence, said to us : —

"The view is fine, is it not? I have lived forty years in this convent without ever leaving it, but I never weary of that view."



“Many monks, some thinking only of another world.” — PAGE 46.

"Forty years!" I exclaimed, almost against my will. "Without ever leaving the convent! Surely you have made a few journeys?"

"True, so I have, — two in all," he answered, "each of six days. I went to Milan, my own city, when my sister was dying and wished me to bring her the last sacraments. Poor, sainted angel! And I went to Rome when my old master Cardinal Peloro received the hat — Yes," he continued, looking fixedly into space, "I came here in 1845. How beautiful Monte-Chiaro was then! What masses were sung! To have seen this convent as I once saw it, and to see it as I now see it is to look upon a body without a soul where all was youth and life — But patience, patience! '*Multa renascentur quæ jam cecidere, cadentque quæ nunc sunt in honore.*' Now, gentlemen, I must leave you to order your dinner. Luigi will bring up your valises. With him, remember, patience, patience. You must shut your eyes and commend yourselves to God!"

With this advice and quotation Dom Griffi left us, and he had scarcely crossed the threshold of the door before Philippe threw himself into a chair with that eternal, sneering laugh of his.

"Upon my word," he cried, "that grotesque old fellow was alone worth the journey."

"I don't know what you find grotesque in what the priest has said or done," I replied.

"He told us in the simplest way of the changes in the convent, which must be a great grief to him, and which he bears with the hope of a true believer. I am nearly fifteen years older than you, I have been about the world as you are going now, in pursuit of many a chimera, and I have, alas, learned to know that there is nothing wiser, nothing nobler here below than a man who works at one work, with the same ideal, in the same corner of this earth."

"Amen!" added my young companion, laughing louder still. "I agree to it all! the chanted masses, his master the cardinal, the sainted soul of his sister, and jostling among them that quotation from Horace, and his functions as an inn-keeper! By the bye, we shall pay him well for his hospitality. This miserable hole," dragging me by the arm into the first bedroom, "is worth, I should say, about a franc a night. But," he added with sarcastic consideration, "since my remarks displease you, my dear master —"

Queer fellow! I cannot better describe the sensation he produced in me than to say it was that of a blind which creaks in the wind. At each new impression his nerves gave forth a rasping note. But the most disconcerting and puzzling thing of all, on which I think I have scarcely dwelt enough, was the flame of intellect running through these whimsical outbreaks of a petulant and ill-bred child. I omitted to say

how, during the journey, he had amazed me by two or three remarks on the geological construction of the country through which we were passing; and now, going out upon a balcony which served for both rooms and looked toward the redoubt which protected the abbey, he began to talk of Florentine architecture like one who had studied it well in books, and also with his eyes, — two forms of study seldom combined. This knowledge, quite other than that his mission had prepared me to expect, showed, in addition to his surprising acquaintance, which I had also detected, with contemporary literature both high and low, an amazing suppleness of intellect. But this intellect seemed to hang to him like a jewel, perhaps I had better say an instrument. It was something worn outside of him. It was not he himself. He possessed it, but it did not possess him; it helped him neither to believe nor to love. I compared him, involuntarily, to the very man, Dom Griffi, at whom he had been scoffing. Certainly the poor monk could never shine through intellectual subtlety, but he conveyed an instant impression of sincere and single-minded devotion to his mission, to his watch over the beloved convent until the longed-for return of his brethren. Comparing the two, which, I asked myself, was the young man, which the old man, if youth consists in grasping an ideal with the force of an invincible will?

However, such as he was, made up of irony and precocious nihilism, my young companion was consistent with himself. He was a complete antithesis to the poor priest self-devoted to the care of an empty monastery, but the antithesis was frank and genuine, the opposition of the present half of our century to the simple and pious spirit of former times. But, I asked myself again, was I not equally unfortunate, even more so, — I, whose life was being spent in the effort to comprehend fully both the criminal charm of negation and the splendors of devout faith without ever remaining at one or the other of these two poles of the human spirit?

These reflections were more importunate still when I found myself seated about seven o'clock before the meal which the abbé had ordered for us in the large hall, formerly, as he told us, the refectory of the convent. A brass lamp of the old shape, with three wicks and the accessories of snuffer, pricker, and extinguisher dangling by little chains of the same metal, gave a smoky light to one corner of an enormous table, on which were glass decanters bearing the arms of the convent. Each of us had two beside him; one filled with wine, the other with water. These were the bottles which formerly doled out to the monks the parsimonious amount of liquid allowed to their thirst. A dish of fresh figs and another of grapes were there for our dessert.

The soup was already served in plates awaiting us, while goat's cheese, raw ham, stale bread, and boiled chestnuts, in other plates, made up the bill of fare, the frugality of which incited the old monk to another Latin quotation of the same order as its predecessor. He had said the *Benedicite* as he sat down with us. "*Castanee molles et pressi copia lactis*," he added, pointing to the dishes which illustrated Virgil's lines.

"I expected that," muttered Philippe in my ear. Then he began, in his most serious manner, to discourse to Dom Griffi of the food of the ancients. I feared, and not without reason, that this apparent amiability was leading up to some jest.

"When you have no guests do you dine alone, Father?" he inquired.

"No," said the abbé; "there are two of the brotherhood still in the convent. They left us seven. Four died of grief immediately after the suppression. We were all ill and we nursed each other as best we could. God was not willing we should all disappear."

"But when you and the two friars are no longer here, what then?" persisted Philippe.

"*Con gallo e senza gallo, Dio fa giorno*," said the priest, a slight cloud crossing his face, which, however, was instantly dispersed; the question touched him cruelly in the most sensitive spot of his whole being. "With or without the cock

God sends the day," he added translating the Italian words.

"But how do you occupy your time, Father?" I said to him, full of eager curiosity in presence of a faith so deep that I could almost fancy myself before a man of the Middle Ages.

"Ah! I have no leisure at all," exclaimed Dom Griffi. "Such as you see me now, I have the convent to look after and all the adjacent land to farm. I employ fifteen peasant families. From early morning it is one long procession to my cell; they never leave me a minute to myself, — accounts to settle, confessions to receive, medicine wanted! I'm a bit of a doctor, of a chemist, a judge, and even a schoolmaster. Yes, I teach the children. Luigi is one of my scholars; he does n't do me credit, but he's a very good fellow. Moreover, I am a guide, and there are strangers to show about the convent — well, not many"

"I met two English ladies at Pisa, — Miss Dobson and Miss Roberts, — who had just come from Monte-Chiaro," I remarked.

"Ha, ha!" he exclaimed, laughing, — "my two red mullets. I call them so from the color of their hair. They are Protestants, but good souls all the same. *Lascia fare a Dio, ch'è santo vecchio*, — 'Let God manage things, he's the oldest of the saints.' They are going to Rome. I said to them, 'Saint Peter is a fisherman; I

hope he may catch my red mullets in his net.' England is getting nearer to God every day," he added, rubbing his hands, "ever since Puseyism. Perhaps you young men will see the great sight of all Christians under one father. After that Antichrist, then the Last Judgment, and then — Peace!"

His eyes shone with a visionary light as he said the words. No believer in the Millennium was ever more fervent. Philippe and I looked at each other. I saw the satire in my companion's eyes, and I heard him, with amazement, make answer: —

"In France also catholicism is making great progress, Father. We have had many edifying examples of holiness, — more especially in an author named Baudelaire, and several of his disciples. They are so humble that they call themselves decadents. They write hymns and chant them to each other. They publish newspapers which preach the word. What can be more edifying than such a faith in early youth?"

"I had not heard of them," said the father. "Decadents, did you say?"

"Yes," replied Philippe, "those who descend, who seek those below —"

"I understand," said the father; "they are repentant, and they do right. We have a proverb: *Non bisogna aver paura che de' suoi peccati*, — 'No need to fear any but our own sins.'"

"Dear Father," I said, to cut short my companion's foolish joke, our frugal supper being now ended, "can we not see to-night those frescos of Gozzoli the English ladies told me of?"

"You cannot judge them very well by this light," said Dom Griffi. Then, carried away by the pleasure of exhibiting his discovery, he added, "But you can see them again to-morrow. Ah! when the monks come back how delighted they will be with those paintings! I hope to find time to clean them thoroughly this winter. Luigi, go and get the taper stick in the chapel; here, take the key," and he drew from his pocket a bunch of enormous keys. "We have to lock every door," he said, "for the peasants are coming and going at all hours. They are worthy souls, but you ought never to tempt the poor."

Luigi soon returned, bearing a sort of rush-light tied to the end of a stick, evidently used to light the altar candles. The monk rose from table, repeated once more the Benedicte, and then with the gayety of a child, he took the brass lamp by the ring at the top and said, laughing: "I march before you, and as we shall pass through an actual labyrinth you can say with Dante, '*Per la impacciata via, retro al mio duca.*'"

"More Dante!" whispered Philippe. "These fellows can't do a thing, they can't even eat a bit

of green cheese, their infernal gorgonzola, without being reminded of a line by that fool of a Florentine whose real name was Durante, that is, Durand. Did you know that? Vallès invented the joke. The Divine Comedy signed Durand! I've a great mind to get it off on our host."

"You are out of your reckoning," I replied. "I have told you already how I admire that great poet."

"I know, I know," he exclaimed; "but that's on your devout, reverent, and sacrificial side. As for me, as you must see, I belong solely to the generation of the iconoclasts — that's all the difference between us."

While we exchanged these remarks in a low voice the cassock of our guide, fantastically illumined by the lamp, whose unprotected flames flickered in the draughts, plunged deeper and deeper into interminable corridors. We went up one staircase and down others. Sometimes we threaded the arcades of a cloister. Now and then a night-bird rose at our approach, or a cat fled away silent and terrified. If there had been but a single gleam of moonlight the romantic mystery of our walk across that vast convent might have furnished forth a nightmare. As it was, I evoked in thought the monks of other ages who had glided through these shadows on their way to prayer. Our guide himself seemed set

back forty years, and to be walking the corridors in a file of his brethren, — young, eager in his beliefs, ardent for his order. What memories must stir within him now that he lived alone in that deserted building! And yet he was gay, almost jovial in the midst of this disaster, through the vigor of his faith. What power lies in that mysterious phenomenon which constitutes belief, — absolute, complete, invincible belief? Dom Griffi paused before a door. He searched through the jailer's bunch which he held in his left hand for another key. The old door creaked on its hinges, and we entered a lofty room where the trembling light of the lamp wicks vaguely lighted two walls painted in fresco, and a third which at first sight I took to be all white-washed.

"My son," said the abbé to Luigi, "give me the rushlight; I will light it. You will let the grease fall on my cassock, — which I am sure doesn't need it."

He set the lamp on the floor and looked carefully to the fastening of the taper at the end of the pole. Then, having lighted the little wick, he began to move the flame here and there along the wall; and as if by magic divers portions of the master's work became alive in its brightness. As the old monk moved the tiny flame from spot to spot along the first wall we saw the bleeding wound of Christ, the hand of the apostle



“Having lighted the little wick, he began to move the flame here and there along the wall.” — PAGE 56.

wounding again that bloody wound, the mournful look of the Saviour, the blending of remorse and curiosity on the features of Saint Thomas, and the angels bearing to heaven the instruments of the Passion, their ethereal faces wet with tears. On the other wall we saw, detail by detail, as the flame showed them, the green tunic and the gold embroideries of Gondoforus, the precious stones of the vases given to the apostle, while peacocks displayed their ocellated tails upon the balconies, parrots of every color swung from the trees, and great lords started for the chase, dragging leopards by chains through mountain fastnesses. And still the little flame of our guide's torch wandered hither and thither like a will o' the wisp. As it passed along, each spot drawn for an instant from shadowy vagueness retreated into the void. It was of course impossible to judge of the work as a whole, but seen thus it had a charm of fantastic strangeness appropriate to the time and place, — all the greater because Dom Griffi, in exhibiting the two frescos, abandoned himself like a child to the passionate delight they afforded him. He loved to look at them, as a miser loves to handle the gold he hoards. Were they not his own creation — his; the precious jewel with which he had enriched his cherished convent? As he talked of them the wrinkles of his expressive old face emphasized his words: —

“See the finger of the apostle — how he hesitates! and our Lord’s gesture, and his lips; that is just as men do when they are wounded and the doctor touches them. Look at that landscape in the background; don’t you recognize Verruca and the hill of Monte-Chiaro? See, to the right, there, are the windows of your room. Those dear angels, their eyes are getting smaller! They weep, but they don’t want to, and so they wrinkle up their noses like that. And there’s the black king; look at his earrings. One of our fathers — who died here after the suppression, God rest his soul! — made a few excavations round one of our convents near Volterra, and he found an Etruscan tomb, and in it were earrings just like these, lying close to the head of a skeleton. I have them now, and I’ll show them you. Now, here — ”

So saying he turned and I saw him direct his taper towards the wall to the right which I had hitherto supposed to be all whitewashed. The magic flame now illumined a spot in that whiteness about the size of half my hand. Chance had willed that in beginning at random to clear off the plaster the old monk had uncovered just half the face of a Madonna, — the line of her chin, her mouth, nose, and eyes. The smile and the glance of the Blessed Virgin thus appearing in the midst of that great white field grasped the mind like something

supernatural. The little flame flickered a trifle, attached as it was to a long pole in the hands of an old man, and the lips of the Madonna seemed to move, her cheeks breathed, her eyes quivered. One might have thought a living woman was there, about to shake off that shroud of plaster and reveal herself to our eyes in the untrammelled grace of her youth. The father was silent now, but his countenance expressed so profound a piety of admiration that I comprehended why it was he had not hastened to remove the plaster from the rest of the fresco. His guileless artistic sense and the fervor of his faith made him feel the poesy of that divine smile and those divine eyes, imprisoned as it were in their coarse casing. We were all silent. Philippe was vanquished for the moment by the force of the impression, and I heard him murmur in a low voice : —

“Why, it’s Edgar Poe — it’s a bit of Shelley!”

The abbé, who certainly had never heard the name of either of those writers, said naïvely, without suspicion that he was making a just criticism on the sentiment of his young guest : —

“No, it’s a Gozzoli. I’ll prove it to you in Vasari. And what do you suppose is behind it? Undoubtedly the miracle of the girdle.”

“What miracle is that?” I asked.

“Dear me!” he said, with visible amazement. “Did you not see in the Cathedral at Pistoia

the girdle of the Blessed Virgin which she threw to Saint Thomas after her assumption? He was absent when she rose to heaven in presence of the other apostles. He came back three days later, and as he still doubted the truth of everything he did not see, the Madonna was so good as to let fall her girdle before his eyes, that he might never doubt again."

He related this legend (which proves, we may remark in a parenthesis, that early Christianity foresaw even the analysts and their possible salvation) as he extinguished the rushlight, which he gave to Luigi; then he locked the door.

The single-minded conviction with which he spoke of the miracle proved to me that he lived in supernaturalism just as the rest of us, sons of our century, live in restlessness and irony. I could not help comparing him, in a way, to the fragment of the fresco he had shown us on the third wall. That uncovered bit of painting sufficed to make the whole blank sheet of plaster a living picture, and he, Dom Griffi, sufficed by his sole presence to make that convent desert a living scene. He was indeed the soul of it, — I felt this now, — and a soul which *represented*, in the exact sense of that word, the souls of his absent brethren. In my childhood I had seen an officer of the Grand Army passing along the pavement of the town in which I was brought up. The old hero limped, for he was wounded at Leipzig; he

was poor, and his ribbon hung upon a threadbare coat. Yet he was to me the whole epic of the Empire, for I knew that the Emperor had decorated him with his own hand. I felt the same impression now as I followed Dom Griffi. He bore his whole order in the folds of the old cassock which Luigi took such ill care of. Such is the grandeur which all absolute abdication of our own personality for the furtherance of some high and noble work bestows upon us. We renounce self, and in so doing we magnify it by a law which modern society, attached to vulgar individualism, strangely ignores. Man is of no value except as he immolates himself to an idea. What is an order, what is an army, if not an organized idea which assimilates to itself thousands of existences? Each of these existences has a share in the united forces of all the others. What would Dom Griffi have been in his convent? Probably an antiquary of narrow mind, who might have catalogued some museum; for no sooner had his enthusiasm abated, as we made our way back to our apartments, than he fell into the jargon of a collector who forgets the fundamental sentiment of a work of art in a discussion of its accessories, its resemblances, and its authenticity.

“A great deal has been written,” he said, “on this very subject of the girdle of the Madonna, and Saint Thomas. You will find in the Acad-

emy at Florence a charming bas-relief of Luca della Robbia, where the Madonna, surrounded by angels, is giving her girdle to the apostle. Francesco Granacci treated the subject twice; so did Fra Paolino, of Pistoia, and Taddeo Gaddi, and Giovanni Antonio Sogliani, and Bastiano Mainardi, — the last at Santa Croce. My red mullets sent me photographs of all these pictures. I am certain our Benozzino's is best of all, judging only by that tiny bit of the Virgin's head. But please come into my cell, and I will show you those earrings and the little collection of Dom Pio Schedone."

We accepted the invitation, Philippe perhaps from archæological instinct, and I from curiosity to see the actual objects among which the old monk passed his life. The disorderly appearance of the first room into which he took us revealed the neglect of the comical servant who answered to the name of Luigi. Piles of books were scattered about, the size and binding of which proclaimed them the Fathers of the Church. In one corner were tools, hammers, a pair of pincers, and a box filled with nails and screws and old iron, showing that Dom Griffi was able to dispense with workmen if mending were needed for locks or furniture. Lemons were drying on a plate. Flasks, with the straw much blackened and soiled, seemed to contain samples of the last harvest of oil and wine.

One of those brown earthenware pots which Tuscan women call "scaldini," and which they fill with charcoal to warm their hands as they hold them by the handles, was the sole sign of comfort in the brick-floored room, where a jet black cat was lazily washing herself. Perhaps some English lady, grateful for his kindness, had sent the poor monk the little silver teapot, sole sign of elegance in this rustic capharnaüm, which Luigi had taken good care not to clean, and which now stood blackening on an upper shelf. A tall crucifix, resting on its base, overlooked the table, which was piled with sheets of paper covered in a large and firm hand-writing.

"Those are my master's sermons, which are sent to me to copy," said Dom Griffi. "The good cardinal is blind, and he wants to have his work printed before his death. He is eighty-seven. Ah! his writing is terribly *perfidious*," added the abbé, using the Italian idiom; "and besides, I have so little time. Happily, I can do with only four hours' sleep. Come, Nero, *mio micino*, *mio mutzi*, get out of that chair, get out of that chair." He spoke to the cat as Pasquale had spoken to his mare, and Nero, apparently comprehending him, jumped from the chair to the pile of papers which contained the old cardinal's claims to posthumous glory.

"Good; sit you there," he said to me; "and you here, Signor Filippo." He had asked our

Christian names at the beginning of dinner so that he might, with the charming familiarity of his country, call us by them. "Dear me!" he went on, looking about him, "where is that rascally box? I see it, under the volume of Fathers which I took down the other day to find a clause in the treatise of Saint Irenæus against the Gnostics. The question was about certain Basilideans who wished to avoid martyrdom on the ground that we ought not to make known our ideas to the common people. Ah! pride, pride! You'll find pride at the bottom of all the heresies and all the sophisms. Faith is a great thing, and it is so easy and simple too. Here's the box. It is open; I never lock anything in this room, because it belongs to me and not to the convent. Where are those earrings?"

While speaking he had disinterred a leather case or coffer, the lock of which was so complicated that in case of injury it would have defied the poor workmen of this remote spot. The cover raised, we saw that the box contained a quantity of small articles wrapped in paper and carefully ticketed. The circular shape of most of these packages clearly indicated that the greater part of the late Dom Pio's collection consisted of coins or medals. I noticed with some surprise that the workmanship of the Etruscan earrings was extremely delicate. Taking up at random one of the little round packages, I read on the



"That's a very fine coin, and extremely rare." — PAGE 65.

paper wrapping the words, "Julii Cæsarius aureus," and on examining the piece of gold I recognized it as genuine. I passed it to Philippe, who called my attention to a head of Mark Antony on the reverse, observing : —

"That's a very fine coin, and extremely rare."

I took up a second, and a third, and then I came with still greater amazement upon a Brutus, the value of which I happened to know, in this wise. When selecting my New Year's presents in the preceding year I chanced to think of offering to certain ladies with whom I had dined little coins or medals to hang upon their bracelets ; and my dear friend Gustave S., one of the most distinguished numismatists of the present day, was kind enough to accompany me to a dealer who makes them a speciality. There I had greatly admired the gold coin which bears the head of the younger Brutus on one side, and on the other that of the elder. My friend could not restrain a smile at my ignorance when, in reply to my remark "I will take this one," the dealer said "Then to you, monsieur, as a friend of Monsieur S., it shall be only thirteen hundred francs." And this coin, which thus had a quotable market value, was here among fifty or sixty others in Dom Pio's collection ! An exclamation escaped me as I showed it to Philippe, and told him what I knew of its value.

"I can easily believe it," he said, "for I know something of numismatics; see how well preserved it is, the edge not worn."

"You have a treasure, Father," I said to Dom Griffi, who was listening without seeming to take our words seriously. I persisted, however, in explaining to him the grounds on which I could myself assure him of the value of at least one of his coins, and of my companion's ability to judge of the rest.

"Dom Pio always told me they were valuable," he said, his face gradually changing its expression. "He had picked them up here and there in his various excavations. When he died, poor Pio, things were at their worst with us; we had just been scattered, and I had so much to do that I neglected to have the collection examined by Professor Marchetti, whom you may have met at Pisa. In fact, I forgot all about it, and if it had not been for King Gondoforus and his jewels I should never have thought of looking at it. It was only the other day, while rummaging among these old books, that I happened to remember I had seen a curious pair of earrings in Dom Pio's possession. I looked in his box and found them, and now I have *happened* to speak of them to you. Bless me!" he continued, rubbing his hands. "I do hope you may be right. There's a terrace near the tower which is falling to ruin, and the government won't give me the money

to repair it; four thousand francs would be enough — but four thousand francs!" he added, shaking his head incredulously as he looked at the coffer.

"If I were you," I remarked, "I should consult the professor you mentioned, Father; for here's an *aureus* of Domitian which I think I have seen among rare coins."

"It is extremely rare," said Philippe, examining it; "and so is this Dide Julien, and that Didia Clara — splendid specimens! Probably some peasant found the treasure of a Roman legion, lost in battle near Volterra, and sold the whole to Dom Pio."

"If that were so," said the abbé, rubbing his hands again, "it would be another proof of how right the dear cardinal was when he used to say, 'Dio non manda mai bocca che non mandi cibo' — 'God doesn't send mouths without sending food.' How I have prayed for that terrace! That's where the sick brothers used to walk in the sun when they were getting well. I'll write to Monsieur Marchetti to come and pay me a visit as soon as he is able. Ah! he is a friend of mine; he likes to come to Monte-Chiaro. To-morrow morning when I say mass I shall thank the Lord and pray for both of you. Dear me! I had almost forgotten to tell Luigi to be ready to serve at six, for at seven I have several appointments."

"Can't you understand," I said to Philippe, a little later as I wished him good-night, "how readily certain circumstances — like these for instance — appear to be providential? This poor monk wants money for his convent; he prays to God with all his might; two strangers prove to him that he has the money in his own hand."

"Oh, the blundering of chance!" cried Philippe, shrugging his shoulders. "Have you ever heard of any young man of talent who needed a trifling sum of money to put him in the way of using his talents and found it? Did any great writer ever win a penny in a lottery? And yet I've known rich and stupid bourgeois in my province whose shares in the Ville de Paris brought them in as much as two hundred thousand francs. A cousin of mine left me a share. Happily I sold it. Would you believe that it has never turned up but once in ten years? It would n't have given me six, nor two, nor even one thousand francs. And here's this imbecile old cowl who will get his six thousand, — more, perhaps, — and spend them, how? in repairing a rotten terrace for monks who will never come back to it! Chamfort said the world was the work of a crazy devil; he had better have said an idiotic one."

"Meantime," I remarked with pretended petulance, as though I were speaking to a small child, — to avoid showing how provoked I felt at

what was, after all, a justifiable complaint, — “go to bed and to sleep, and let me do likewise.”

As the wind had risen, — a melancholy autumn wind, — blowing gently, yet plaintively, about the convent, I found a certain difficulty in carrying out my own programme and in falling asleep on the rather hard bed of the late priors. I heard Philippe Dubois moving about his room, and I wondered whether, in spite of his ironical mood (too exaggerated to be perfectly genuine), he was not touched by the noble sight our host had shown us all that evening of a pious and self-devoted life. The priest's remarks on the providential character of certain meetings came back to me. Is it possible to think deeply and sincerely upon our own destiny and that of those nearest to us without a dim consciousness or intuition that a spirit hovers over us and guides us, by ways that are often tortuous, to ends of which we have no perception? Above all, in the punishment of our faults, does not this mysterious agent reveal its presence? — a presence recognized by the moralists of all ages, from the Greek poets who worshipped Nemesis, that mysterious universal equity, to Shakspeare and Balzac, the masters of modern art; for is not their work controlled by the vision of a final and mighty justice enveloping human life? So thinking, I began to make objections, from that wretched habit of see-

ing the pros and cons, which we cannot get rid of as easily and simply as our good host had done. I thought of that other law, the law of decadence, which requires the death of all things, even the noblest of human existence, from the moral being of a convent to the masterpieces of a glorious art. The frescos of Benozzo were just recovered, after a loss of four centuries, only to disappear again in a hundred or more years, destroyed then by the irresistible hand of Time. Yes, all dies, and all begins anew. Dom Griffi had spoken of the Basilideans, of their subtle theories and the pride which underlies all heresies. I remembered the astonishing analogy which struck me, when I studied the doctrines of Alexandria, between those famous paradoxes and the moral maladies of our own day. My young companion was a case in point; had he not maintained to me, apropos of the relations between a writer and the public, precisely that sophism of falsehood from contempt which was dear to the Gnostics? I heard him even then pacing his room, — was he restless? was he, too, discussing problems? — until at last, in the midst of contradictory arguments, I fell asleep; and when I woke in the morning, it was to see the innocent Luigi standing at my bed's head with a tray on which was my coffee; and almost at the same moment Dom Griffi entered the room.

“Ah, bravo!” he cried, with his cheery laugh; “you have slept well, and you have given the lie to an old proverb, *Chi dorme non piglia pesci*,—‘He who sleeps does n’t catch fish;’ for a peasant has brought you some fresh trout for your breakfast. As for Signor Filippo, he was off early on the mountain. When I returned from mass, about half-past six, I caught sight of him climbing beyond the village, as active as a cat. When you are ready we’ll go and see the Benozzos by daylight. By that time Signor Filippo will have got back, no doubt. You shall also see the convent library. Ah! if you only knew how rich it was before the first suppression,—I mean that of Napoleon I. Well, patience, patience,—all the more because we can now build up the terrace. ‘*Multa renascentur.*’”

An hour later I was dressed and I had drunk, not without some grimaces, the coffee, based on chicory, made by Luigi. The father and I paid another visit to the Eastern king, Gondoforus, and to the “Smile of the Virgin.” Dom Griffi found time to show me the refectories, small and large, the library, the chapels, the fish-pond, the cisterns, and the narrow garden where he was raising tiny cypresses, intending to plant them out. Philippe was still absent. Had he lost his way? Or did he feel an antipathy to the monk’s society and conversation, such as nervous temperaments like his are unable to control? I

should have asked myself these questions with some indifference, I must admit, so annoying had his flippancy become to me, if, after returning to the convent about eleven o'clock, I had not been literally terrified by the result of a trifling circumstance, which was purely accidental, and which I myself had brought about without the smallest presentiment.

Dom Griffi had just excused himself. He was obliged to leave me alone until breakfast. I had no books with me. My correspondence, strange to say, was written up. "Suppose I look over those coins," I thought, and thereupon I asked the father for the coffer, which he kindly brought to me himself. Peaceably installed in my bedroom, I unfolded the papers one by one, admiring the profile of some laurel-crowned emperor, or the figure of a Victory. I don't know why the fancy took me to examine the *aureus* of Cæsar with the head of Antony. I looked for it among the others and could not find it. I took out the packages one by one, but the name of the dictator did not appear on any one of them. "We must have folded them wrong," I said to myself, and I took the trouble to undo each one. The coin of Cæsar was not among them; nor that of Brutus either. I think I never in my life felt an agony like that which gripped my heart when I felt certain that the two coins, worth over two thousand francs, which



“The Abbé saw by my face that I had something important to say.” — PAGE 73.

had been in the box the night before, were no longer there. I had held them in my own hand. I had examined them with a glass; I had myself revealed their probable price to Dom Griffi, — and they had disappeared! I hoped he might have put them aside, in consequence of what we said, so as to send them to Pisa and verify their genuineness as soon as possible. I ran to his cell at the risk of interrupting him; it was impossible for me not to relieve my mind instantly. Dom Griffi was engaged in recovering a debt from a tall sun-burnt rogue of a peasant, who was holding in his horny hand a leather pocket-book, from which he drew, with comic regret, various paper notes of the value of five and ten francs. The abbé saw by my face that I had something important to say.

“Your friend is not ill?” he inquired hastily.

“No” I answered. “But let me ask you one question, Father. Did you take any of those gold coins we were handling yesterday from Dom Pio’s box?”

“None; I took none,” he answered simply; “the box remained just where we left it.”

“Great God!” I exclaimed in terror, “at least two are missing, and the most valuable,—the Cæsar and the Brutus.”

I had no sooner uttered the words than I felt the full force of their bearing. No one, until our arrival, had suspected the money value of

Dom Pio's collection. The Cæsar and the Brutus were the very coins we had chiefly noticed. They had been stolen. Luigi certainly would not have selected them from the others, nor would any of the peasants, like the rustic I could see at this moment fingering his dirty bank-bills with a clumsy hand. On the other hand, I myself could not be suspected. I was in my bed when the father said mass and his room was left empty. Since then he and I had been together. The flash of an intolerable evidence made me cry out : —

“No, no, it is impossible !”

I had a vision of Philippe, tempted, almost immediately after our conversation of the night before, by the close proximity of the little treasure. The sound of his steps late in the night echoed in my memory, and brought with them a dreadful explanation. He had said so much to me during our journey of his great need of a sum of money to support him while starting on his career in Paris. He had seen that sum within his grasp. He had struggled, struggled, and then, — he had yielded. He was guilty of this theft, so easy to commit, and so doubly infamous inasmuch as the poor old monk was our hospitable entertainer. He must have risen a little before the hour of service. He had left his chamber. He had slipped into the now empty cell of his host. He had taken the two coins

which he knew to be most valuable, and probably others. Then he had left the convent and walked about the country, no doubt to give some reason for his early rising and perhaps to quell the anguish which must have shaken him ; for between the paradoxes of the boldest intellectual immorality and a shameful action like this there is a gulf. In presence of this horrible and overwhelming probability I was seized with such emotion that my legs gave way and I was forced to sit down, while Dom Griffi said to the peasant with his customary gentleness : —

“Go and wait in the corridor, Peppe. I’ll call you.”

When we were alone he turned to me.

“Now, my son,” he began, in a voice I had not yet heard him use, not the voice of a kindly host, but that of a priest, as he took both my hands in his, “look me in the face. You feel that I know it was not you, do you not ? Say nothing, explain nothing, and make me a promise —”

“To compel that unhappy man to make restitution. Ah ! Father, if I have to wrench those coins from his hands or deliver him myself to the police.”

“You have not guessed my meaning,” he said, shaking his head. “I wish you, on the contrary, to promise me on your honor that you will not let drop a word which can make him suspect that you have discovered the loss of

those coins, — not one word, do you understand me? and not one gesture. I have a right to ask this, have I not?”

“I don’t understand,” I began.

“Pazienza,” he said, employing his favorite word, “give me your promise, and then let me finish with that dreadful Peppe. Ah! these peasants will be the death of me before I get the brothers back again. They squabble, franc by franc, over the payment of their leases; but then, you know, we must shut our eyes and commend ourselves to God. Have I your promise?”

“You have,” I replied, yielding to a species of authority which seemed to emanate from his person at that moment.

“And will you bring the coffer to me at once?”

“I will fetch it, Father.”

In spite of my promise I could scarcely contain myself when, half an hour after this interview, I met Philippe Dubois returning from his walk. I must say to his credit that his face betrayed an inward anxiety which would have fully convinced me of his guilt had I retained the slightest doubt of it. He must have felt sure of his secret however, for my second examination of Dom Pio’s collection was the merest accident, and no one but me could have missed the stolen coins. We had mentioned them too

briefly for the monk to remember their names. Therefore it was no fear of discovery that gave so gloomy an expression of uneasiness to that intelligent brow and to the eyes that were so lively only the night before. I guessed that remorse and shame were rending him. He was so young, in spite of the cynical mask he chose to wear, so near to the hearth of home, so nurtured in provincial loyalty in spite of his intellectual depravity! He noticed my depressed manner, but if at first he suspected its true cause the silence I maintained in accordance with my promise must have reassured him.

"I have had a splendid walk," he said, without my asking him a single question as to how he had spent the morning. "Only I lost my way, and have got back too late to go over the convent. I don't regret that; I should be sorry to spoil the impression of last night by seeing those frescos in broad daylight. At what time do we start?"

"About half-past two," I replied.

"Then" said he, "if you will allow me, I will go and fasten my valise."

He went into his room on that pretext, and I heard him walking up and down as he had done during the night. My presence was evidently intolerable to him. How would it be when he met the abbé? I dreaded, with an uneasiness which was actual suffering, the moment when

we should all three be seated at the table of the refectory, forced to converse, the priest and I knowing what we did know, and he with this weight on his heart. Curiosity, I must admit, was mingled with my uneasiness. In demanding my absolute silence Dom Griffi must certainly have had some purpose. Did he hope to induce the young man to confess privately, and so humiliate him as little as possible? Or, with the divine mercy which shone in his eyes — the eyes of a true believer — had he resolved to forgive in silence, and rely upon what was left of Dom Pio's collection to rebuild the terrace? At any rate the breakfast hour came, as all hours come; Dom Griffi called us himself in his usual cheery and cordial voice.

"Well, Signor Filippo," he said, grasping both the young man's hands affectionately, "you must be hungry after your walk."

"No, Father," answered Philippe, who seemed disturbed by the friendly pressure, "but I am afraid I have taken cold."

"Then you must drink a little of my 'vino santo,'" replied the monk. "Do you know why we give it that name? We hang the grapes to dry till Easter-day, and then we press them. There's a Tuscan proverb: *Nell' uva sono tre rinaccioli*, — 'there are three 'seeds in a grape;' *uno di sanità, uno di letizia, e uno di ubriacchezza*, — 'one of health, one of gayety, one of



“Grasping both the young man’s hands affectionately.” — PAGE 78.

intoxication.' But in my 'vino santo' there are only the first two."

He kept up a series of cheerful and kindly remarks throughout the meal, which consisted of the promised trout, roasted chestnuts, eggs in an omelet supposed to be fried, and thrushes — those thrushes gorged with grapes and juniper which are the autumn luxury of this ever-blessed region of Italy.

"I have never been able to eat a single one of those little birds," said the father, "they fly so near to me here. But our peasants catch them with birdlime. Haven't you noticed the men and boys with tame owls. They lay sticks covered with lime round the vineyards. Then they put an owl on the ground fastened to another stick. It hops about here and there. The birds are attracted by curiosity. They light on the sticks and are caught. I am surprised that no poet has ever made a tale of that little picture."

Not an allusion to the lost coins, not a word! Not one word either to show a difference in his regard towards me and towards my companion; possibly there was something a little more caressing in his manner to Philippe, who, I saw plainly, was overcome by the almost affectionate kindness of the man he had so basely betrayed. A score of times I saw tears at the rim of his eyelids; evidently he was not born to evil.

Twenty times I was on the point of saying to him, "Ask pardon of this saint, and make an end of it." But instantly as the moisture came, he would frown, his nostrils contracted, the fire of pride would quench the tears within his lids, and the conversation went on, or rather, I should say the monologues of Dom Griffi, who presently compared his beloved Monte-Chiaro with Monte-Oliveto, and spoke with tenderness of a friend of his, who is also a friend of mine, the dear Abbé de N——, who had undertaken a duty like his own. Then he told us many anecdotes about the convent, some of them very interesting, — one, for instance, of a visit of the Constable de Bourbon on his way to Rome, when he secretly ordered the prior to say a mass for his soul, naming the day which did actually succeed his death. Other tales were naïve and childlike, and related mostly to local legends. It was not till after the meal was over and we had returned to our sitting-room that I fathomed his intention and understood the idea suggested to him by his knowledge of the human heart, — knowledge which none but a confessor can ever really obtain. Having left us for a few moments he returned with Dom Pio's coffer in his hand. I glanced at Philippe. He had turned livid. But the wrinkled face of the monk gave no sign of stern arraignment.

"You have taught me the value of these

coins," he said simply, as he placed the box on the table. "There are more than I need to repair the terrace. Do me the favor to select two or three for each of you, and keep them in memory of an old monk who prayed for you both this morning."

He looked at me as he said the words as if to remind me of my promise. Then he left the room, and Philippe Dubois and I remained alone and motionless. I trembled lest the guilty man should guess that I knew his secret. The divine mercy of Dom Griffi, destined to produce a well-nigh blasting repentance through excessive shame, could only have its full effect on this anguished soul if the gall of wounded self-love were not present.

"What is better than a good priest?" I said at last, merely to break the silence.

Philippe made no answer. He turned hastily to the window and looked at the green prospect we had so much admired on our arrival; he was plunged in thought. I opened the coffer and took a coin at random to obey our entertainer; then I went into my bedroom. My heart was beating hard. Presently I heard the young man rush away; quick, quick rang his footsteps in the direction of the monk's cell. His pride was conquered. He had gone to return the stolen coins and confess his fault. In what words he addressed the father he had so insolently

compared to the late Hyacinthe, and how the latter answered him, I shall never know. But when we were once more in the carriage and Pasquale was saying to his mare, "Come, Zara, show your legs." I turned to give another glance at the convent we were leaving and to bow to the abbé; and as I did so I saw in the look which my companion was casting on the simple monk *the dawn of another soul*. No, the era of miracles is not over, but saints are needed, and they — are scarce.



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